ED 464 627   IR 021 397

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TITLE   It Takes a Village: Considerations for Effective Mentoring
                Relationships in Instructional Technology.
PUB DATE   2002-04-00
NOTE   6p.; In: Teaching, Learning, & Technology: The Connected
                Classroom. Proceedings of the Annual Mid-South Instructional
                Technology Conference (7th, Murfreesboro, TN, April 7-9,
                2002); see IR 021 870.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text:
                http://www.mtsu.edu/~itconf/proceed02/index.html.
PUB TYPE   Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) --
                Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Computer Uses in Education; Educational Objectives;
                *Educational Technology; Higher Education; *Mentors;
                Phenomenology; Social Change; Socialization; *Teacher
                Student Relationship; *Technology Integration
IDENTIFIERS   *Cultural Change; Technology Utilization

ABSTRACT
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TITLE PAGE

Title: It Takes a Village: Considerations for Effective Mentoring Relationships in Instructional Technology

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Abstract

Integrating instructional technology into educational practices involves manifesting and sustaining a culture. A process of socialization intercedes to bring about the assimilation of these novel educational approaches. Mentoring relationships are essential in fulfilling organizational objectives related teaching in the 21st century. Ways of establishing and operating these interactions are exemplified along with a phenomenological reflection of the experiential aspects of mentoring instructional technology.

Images that convey the qualities of community more adequately describe the inter-relationships characterized by computer technology in learning environments. The village conjures a set of patterns in human arrangements within a context of developing societal configurations. Analogously, the present stage of instructional technology compares to anthropological connotation as well as offers the necessity of community to support IT as an element of educational practice. The complexity of interactions and individuals is dramatically expanding and transforming the nature of this particular culture.

Where once was a wilderness of teachers and students, isolated in their classrooms, has entered an entire group of people that has electronically connected a vast and powerful communication network, hearkening to the major social impact of a significant technological advance. That input has altered the previous patterns of human relationships into "quicker, closer, and smaller" groupings of humans from mere family units living in a territory to tribal communities organized more like villages. The archaeology of instructional technology recognizes the evolutionary moment of the personal computer. Almost like gaining a new sense or cognitive ability, individuals communicate qualitatively more efficiently and access comparatively tremendous increments of information. The global village is indicated by electronic addresses and bookmarks. Its artifacts are online and the paths thru the villages are ridden with email, profuse with chats and websites along the way.

This narrative is an ethnography of a culture that is being discovered more for its current rather than past history. These data have been gathered naturalistically from participant observation with the ethnographers as members of the study. The bias is obvious yet the depth of the elucidation is also reasonably apparent. The field notes are extensive (much downloadable) and corroborated by similar documentation in learning communities now the world over. The following section presents a particularly evolutionary perspective, fueled by culture conflict and assimilation. The remaining segments examine the mentoring or supportive elements within this culture as a case study of structural and functional aspects of this new electronic culture as emerging in higher education.

Cultures change more radically when undergoing some kind of conflict. Framing the revolution of instructional technology in those terms can capture the thoughts and feelings of some who are in the midst of the conquest and resisting its infusion. It can be said the academic community is being overrun by instructional technology with campaigns of online course attack, multimedia massacres, and web page pogroms. Marauding by email has been extensive with massive onslaughts of comments coming from everywhere and masquerading as junk mail. Viruses and poisonous worms are being spread which cripple equipment and industry. Widespread panic has been sewn regarding the rights of intellectual property. Fears abound as questions are raised, "Will one day all faculty be replaced by three dimensional holograms and satellite interactive communication?" and murmurs respond, "Resistance is futile...you will be assimilated."

Libraries are being built yet no one might go there physically any more. Electronic portfolios have opened windows into areas once private. Papers get sent online and who know who wrote them. Exams are taken by those suspected as professional test-takers. Who will need the buildings of campus anymore except as repositories of computer equipment? Those very hallways and offices are presently being infiltrated with technicians who speak a different dialect filled with new terms and meanings from combinations of the old words into almost another language. Tremendous amounts of resources are being diverted, aided by the hidden taxation of technology fees.

The process of assimilation is being implemented thru massive promotion by the computer industry, putting corporate power into traditional educational systems far beyond the textbook publisher. The rapidity of this enculturation is transformational and accelerating, having begun just a few years ago and now reaching global parameters. With geometric progression, the concepts of the

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1980's became a physical force in the 1990's, invading the college campus with exponential growth and epidemic proportion. A new cultural identity is formulating and the golden bough is becoming an electroplated chip.

The village under study here is deemed East Tennessee State University. The ethnographic summarization focuses now on the experiences of a faculty member who has been assimilated into this brave new world and currently assists others into homo sapiens technologo. It will be scripted as a story, one unique in particularity yet commonly reminiscent of many in higher ed's virtual reality.

I was born a too small child, one who would have died if not for technology. My young life was paralleled by the early childhood development of electronics, hearing radios with transistors and watching television while gadgets proliferated in the home and business. Trains, planes, and automobiles expanded my universe while moving upwardly mobile. Pictures were taken, even those that moved, while dancing to the sounds of bands, not live but in stereos. Science fiction introduced the imaginable, and then somehow the alien became real. The concept of computerization was formed, as fundamental as on and off yet remarkably able to transcend the illusory boundary of the binary and generate an expansion of human function comparable to animal domestication or even fire. Now I'm perched on the precipice of a new era, inextricably marching in a technological world while sometimes wondering how long humanity will survive.

I remember hearing about personal computers back in the 80's. I figured purchasing one would be a great way to learn how to use one. Soon I learned that it only did what could be done by other means so I settled into using it the only way I needed – to type. Email and the www. were but distant storms on the horizon. Blackboard and smartboards were not even trademarked. Educational use of the computer was limited to the same place as videotapes and there has been no future in correspondence courses. Then came the Internet.

And it really hit me. I was even going thru my second computer, upgrading from the 8088 to the 486, and yet knew nothing of this new e-world. As a glorified typewriter and a fast calculator, the PC did not change my professional lifestyle that much. Not until instructional technology came to the ivory tower along with email/internet did the way of life for faculty make its cultural change. It has now happened. There will be continued development and even some future stages of technological facilitation, e.g., the days of Star Trek may arrive, but there has occurred the critical mass necessary to merge life at the university with technology. We cannot go back now unless there is an immense, global catastrophe of economic, political, or ecological significance.

Just like myself, there have been computers in college for some time, PC's (MAC) for word processing and mainframes for data processing and programming. The stage was set for the invasion. Distance Ed was the entry point, facilitated by insiders, also called early adopters, and then came the climactic waves of instructional technology and academic technology services. Several new branches of organizational charting protruded and the world changed.

ETSU initiated a strategic plan for goals related to instructional technology. Rooms all over campus were upgraded with computers for students. A help line for technical services for students and faculty became operational. Extra technical personnel were hired and placed throughout the campus to provide service. External contracts were signed for specialized instructional technology personnel. Training schedules were set up to train faculty and courses were expanded for students. A few classrooms had been set up for multimedia purposes. These were upgraded while every classroom was retrofit for Internet access. Some multimedia classrooms were designed with smartboards, presentation equipment including document projection, DVD, videotape as well as wireless and touch controls.

So how do you get faculty to buy into all this? There were a few early adopters who had built some courses and a lot of faculty were using their email and the web, quickly becoming accepted and utilized by all but a small number of Luddites. But there needed a broad based stimulus, a peer

influence that built support within academic departments. Academic Technology Services, a unit of the Office of Instructional Technology spearheaded a creative approach. They designed a graduate class, actually a 2 consecutive semester series of courses, named Faculty Technology Leadership I and II. Three doctoral level faculty taught as a team and were assisted by several technical instructors with guest speakers rotating their specialized expertise. A notable feature was the regular appearance of an IT expert who was brought electronically with full audio/video synchronous participation. She coordinated discussions and "hands-on" projects from a computer screen.

The faculty members, i.e., students, were selected as a cross section from colleges and departments throughout the university. I was fascinated that this group of individuals who had terminal degrees was willing to accept a situation where they were required to write papers, take exams, and complete projects. Attendance was to be monitored and participation factored in to receiving a grade. Perhaps the reinforcement provided by trips and equipment was a factor. We were able to go to conferences as well as have, for our very own use, a laptop.

The course had a dual purpose, to learn instructional technology and to generate projects that would facilitate the use of instructional design within academic units. Lectures and discussions focused on instructional processes facilitated by technology and ways to mentor this enhancement of educational delivery. Experiential sessions trained software skills related to web page design, course management systems, and course editing as well as multimedia functions and presentation/scanning equipment. Faculty engaged in group and individual projects, designed to further independent and college level goals.

The faculty projects were outstanding. A biologist collaborated with an advanced graphics design team to create a lifelike interactive digital video of molecular processes. An anthropologist created a teaching website that highlighted the "Gray Fossil" archaeological discovery. A librarian developed a tutorial for the library's online card catalog and electronic databases. A business professor designed core competencies assessment for incoming MBA students. An interior designer taught students to use electronic portfolios to showcase their design projects, and a psychologist put a journal online. The next cohort of FTL II faculty is completing the next generation of even bigger projects.

One of the more significant benefits of the FTL course has been its collegiality. By introducing the dynamics of a college course, the faculty members were enabled to relate like students. These individuals had taught classes all week and, on Friday afternoons, gathered as once were their charges, becoming then so similar to what they decried as teachers. They would complain about the instructors going too fast, making them do too much homework (especially considering all the other stuff we students have to do), being late or absent noticeably, waiting until the last minute to turn in assignments, criticizing the course content and teaching methods and developing mutual support for a spokesperson for change. The roles can shift so easily sometimes and often without conscious awareness.

But this does pull a group together and permit cohesiveness, a sense of solidarity. Periodically the class would meet at a local establishment for refreshments and conversation. When discussions were directed toward how to continue the collegiality after the end of the course sequence, the decision was made for a more formal group entitled, the Faculty Technology Leadership Association. Officers were elected and since then the group gets together about twice per semester at a local establishment for refreshments and conversation, sharing ideas and practices while renewing friendships and staying abreast of people's lives.

The course sequence has continued, finishing FTL II in a few weeks and currently setting up for FTL III. Meanwhile, the university has started another initiative related to IT. Called the Faculty Mentoring Center, a large area available in an unused area was converted into cubicles, offices, presentation area, and service facilities filled with computers and presentation/editing equipment.

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Staffed by a coordinator and assisted by faculty mentors with talent infusing their courses with technology. They are given reduced course loads in response to this contribution. The FMC Coordinator arranges regularly scheduled informal sessions over lunch and refreshments to share activities and perspectives while also setting up workshops for training faculty in various design approaches to online course development.

The university has sponsored a teaching and learning center that is directed by a faculty member with administrative appointment. A number of mentoring and learning opportunities abound yet there is also a strong emphasis on instructional technology. Workshops are also regularly scheduled there to instruct skills and provide support. The current director was previously an instructor for the FTL course and is acknowledged an early adopter of technology at this campus. The previous director was instrumental in approving FTL and attended many classes herself.

Because of the significance of instructional technology to education, there is a special focus on this within the ETSU College of Education. A college-wide committee was established and chaired by OIT staff member who administers instructional technology for the college. Known as a very active committee, there are several subcommittees that focus on technology integration, equipment, and other issues. There are several computer labs, three multimedia rooms, and mobile cabinets that contain computer and presentation equipment.

The COE also has received a rather large grant from Kellogg that supports technology training and services termed "Preparing Today's Teachers for Tomorrow" or "PT3". A variety of activities are supported with a major thrust to technically train local educators in rural areas. For the university several advantages for faculty mentoring were noted. The grant allowed stipends for attending training to integrate technology into their courses, specifically for a syllabus revision. Attendance to conferences for presentation of research was facilitated. In addition, funding was available for an Educational Technology Review Center, which collects, evaluates and stores educational software and digital equipment like cameras and presentation equipment.

Instructional Technology is a partnership between ETSU and COLLEGIS, a relationship that has had its own detractors and proponents. Logic and necessity support some type of interaction with business and industry but politics are alive and well in a university environment. The university is paying faculty the equivalent of $1800 for preparation of an online course and the assurance it will be taught at least 3 times in the next 3 years. Collaboration is established with the Regent's Online Degree, several bachelor degrees that can be obtained entirely online and can be taken at any universities within the Tennessee Board of Regents.

And here I sit…in front of the computer, grading exams on Bb, reading papers from my laptop and writing this one, going back and forth online to email and check references or information. Luckily I've got a nice view. It's a great place to write. Now, if I could just put up a camera with some excellent audio and pipe in my real image, ideally holographically with the whole class perceptibly experiential, we'd really be getting somewhere. You know, maybe it wouldn't be so bad. We could create the ideal set of teachers as holograms…then we could settle down and actually get some research done!

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EFF-089 (9/97)